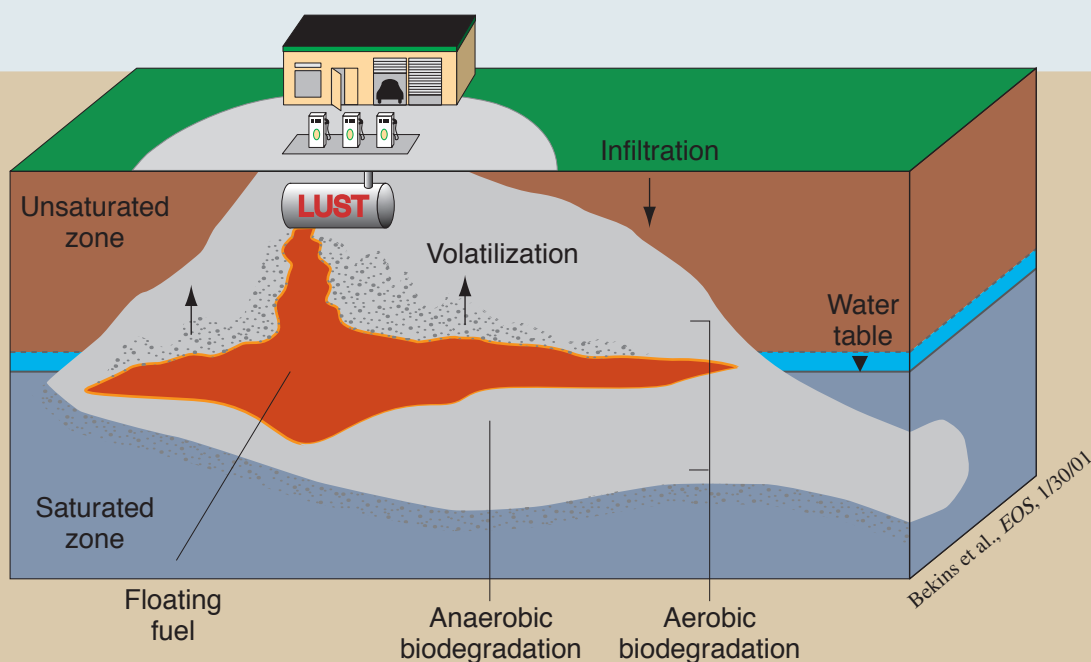


# How the Earth Copes with Our LUSTs

## *The amazing capabilities of subsurface life*

By Barbara Bekins, USGS Research Hydrologist



**LUST= Leaking Underground Storage Tank**

- By some estimates, the total carbon in subsurface bacteria is nearly as large as the carbon in all surface plants
- Underground microorganisms are capable of biodegrading an array of industrial contaminants, including petroleum-based fuels
- In the late 1990s this knowledge was used to revise clean-up strategies for LUST sites
- There are more than 3,000 LUST sites in California—more than 450 in the Bay Area